

Kim Docs

On the question of spectatorship.
1st issue.
A Quarterly.
2018, Riga

With contributions by Pedro Barateiro, Santa France, Gints Gabrāns, Katerina Gregos, Kaspars Groševs, Inga Lāce, Katrīna Neiburga, Jaakko Pallasvuo, Monika Pormale, Viktor Timofeev, Marta Trektere, Beti Žerovc, and others.



THE OPENING MONOLOGUE

1.

The opening monologue. Current affairs and some jokes while outside everyone is protesting for something. Comments and the reduction of language. Actions beyond the white page, the white room, beyond the white building that hides the narrative.

I don't wish to be abstracted from this moment. I don't want to use your harmless Wi-Fi connection and substitute it for my dreams, my personal unconscious mass. Please, leave it alone.

Although this could be the opening monologue, it isn't. This is not a hypnosis session with your therapist. The obsession with empty placeholders. I kindly ask you to be with me in this moment. And being with me means being with yourself with us.

Be aware of the fiction. Be aware of the documentary. Be aware of the immense flow coming your way.

We stare at these things as we once stared at landscape. Footsteps. Prints.

I'd like to speak to you as if you were an animal prepared to react physically to the surrounding environment. I never forget Frantz Fanon's words: "Every spectator is a coward or traitor."

The first thing to consider is how to address each other. How do we address each other in a way that is respectful, forgiving, in pace with the nature of our minds? Why is writing a tool for thinking?

Who is writing what? And why do we find freedom in writing? And we are writing more than ever.

Synapses as distribution. The movement. The relation. The event.

The voices of hundreds of unemployed workers and their silenced thoughts. The beep of the bar code reader.

2.

We're talking from the West. We call ourselves the West. West of what? North of whom? The West of us. Someone who speaks funny. Changing one letter for another.

Tongue. Syllables and their movement in another direction.

The Chinese have five cardinal directions: East, South, West, North, and Center.

A cold polar wind.

Circumnavigation and ghosts.

Black-and-white images that retell the past over and over again.

Merchandise.

Chin up.

A cardboard box waiting.

I don't know about you but I try hard to think on how language colonizes us. And words. And ideas. Our mouths repeat chants, unknowingly. We sing.

But why are we singing so loud? And whom are we singing for?

What can we do besides opening up the space to make questions? Is the spoken word the ultimate form of freedom? Is language capable of having a real effect in the world?

Freedom of information.

Freedom on the Internet.

Freedom of the individual.

I'm a cyborg. I'm speaking from my computer, but I'm writing with a golden pencil. An oracle. Algorithms who speak the word of finance. They speak for us.

Invisible hands.

Invisible arms.

Invisible brains.

Invisible keyboards.

Invisible lungs.

During these past years forms of resistance have played a major role in redefining political and social space. The overflow of political commentary can find a parallel only in the amount of fiction written. The solution was to multiply space, to find new ways of projections of any kind. The ideology was that of producing more spectators, more refugees.

The total loss of coordinates.

Total and absolute displacement.

The time you spend writing.

The time I spend drawing.

Writing what is necessary.

Drawing as an endurance test.

Saving on words, sentences.

Titles.

The task of the translator. The sea.

Only when we need to find ourselves we become obsessed with cardinal points.

[...]

Pedro Barateiro

An excerpt from *The Opening Monologue* (2017). Courtesy of the artist.

Pedro Barateiro (b. 1979, lives and works in Lisbon) has had solo exhibitions at REDCAT, Kunsthalle Basel and Serralves Museum. His work has been included in exhibitions such as the 29th Bienal de São Paulo, 16th Sydney Biennale and 5th Berlin Biennale. A monographic volume of his work was just published by Kunsthalle Lisbon and Sternberg Press.

Dedicated to Aunt May and Uncle Jim

According to French-American artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), art exists only in the eye of the beholder, thus for him a spectator is the most important condition for art's existence. In 1964 American artist Allen Kaprow (1927-2006) reacted to the question of changing audiences by trying to strictly control the relations between the artistic realm and its viewers. According to him, the new post war audiences did not have the required knowledge and needed to be educated:

“Aunt May and Uncle Jim do not always fit the philistine costume history has assigned them. Attracted to art by its promotion in mass media, they come to an artist enthusiastically but with little grasp of what that artist is doing.”

More than a decade later, artist and critic Brian O'Doherty (b. 1928) in his seminal piece “Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space” (his essays originally appeared in *Artforum* magazine in 1976 and 1986), concludes that “we seem to have ended up with the wrong audience.” According to him, the fault of an artwork's inaccessibility also lies within the viewer. In the 90's contemporary art in the Baltic States was meant, among other things, to be used as a tool to modernise and liberalise our post Soviet societies. However, at the same time it was sometimes labelled by local audiences as alien and strange (against local traditions, too postmodern, western, cosmopolitan, etc.). In 2003, French philosopher Jacques Rancière (b. 1940) criticised the concept of an uneducated “passive” viewer and introduced the concept of an “emancipated spectator”, the one who does not need to be “educated” to meaningfully participate in the process of experiencing artworks but is able to interpret, “to translate” artworks.

Thus, welcome to the era of new spectatorship in the age of attention deficit disorder and excessive scrolling. Who are we, the contemporary art audiences in the great new world who not only declare “the end of politics” is “after the nature” (referring to the books “After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene” by Jedediah Purdy or “Thinking like a Mall. Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature” by Steven Vogel), announce that “we have never been modern” (Bruno Latour), “we have never been human” (Donna Haraway) or “we have never been only human” (Michel Foucault), inhuman, posthuman (Rosi Braidotti)?

Valentinas Klimašauskas

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Fig. 1



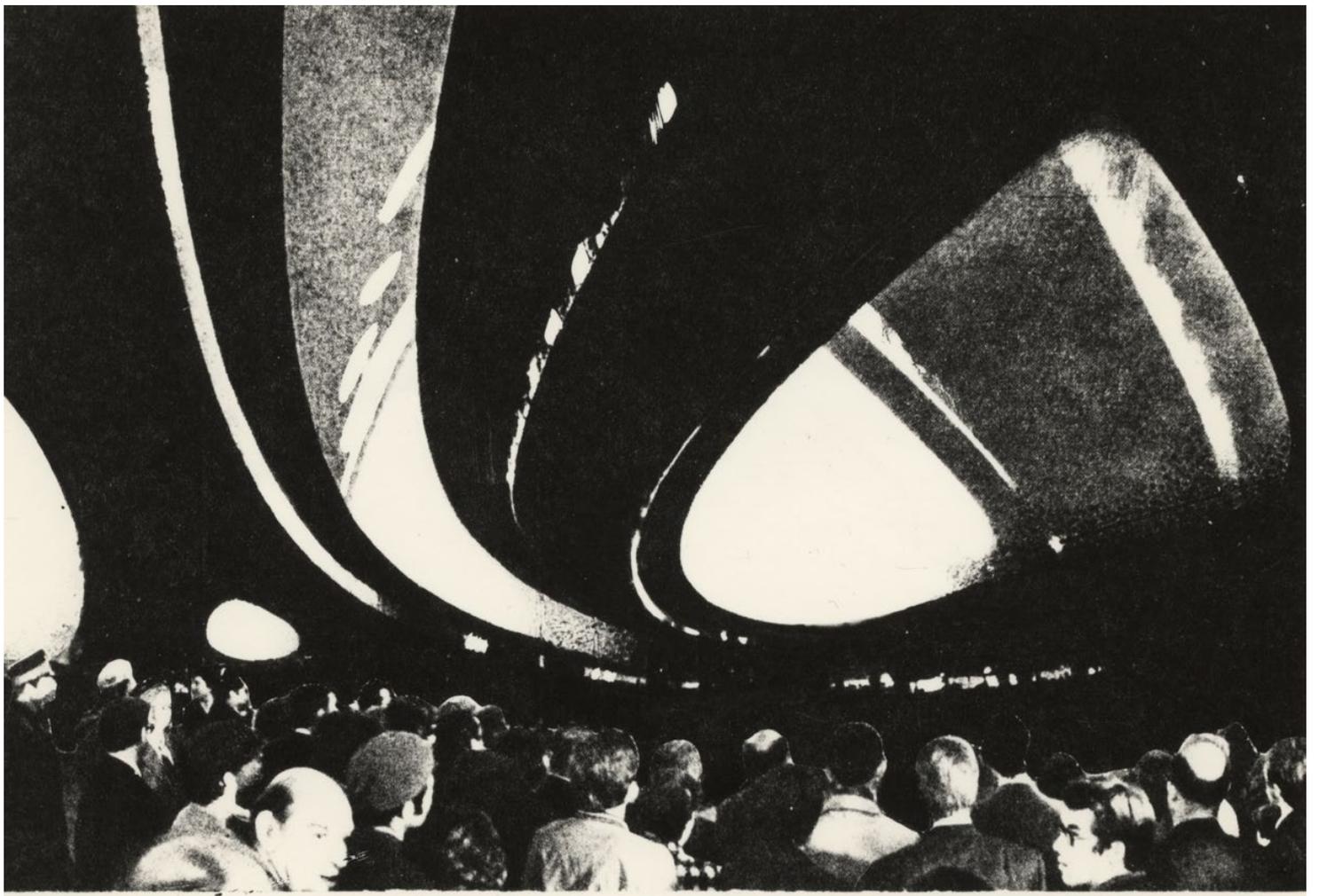
Fig. 1

Fig. 1, 2—Grīnbergs, Andris (b. 1946, lives in Riga).
Happening *The Old house*. Photo: Māra Brašmane.
Location: 21 Elizabetes (formerly Kirova) Street, Riga. 1977.

“The happening *The Old House* was held in a once-grand but now-abandoned house and served as both a farewell to the place and as a celebration of changing times. The participants, either naked or clothed, visualizing the emotional narrative, enlivened the abandoned interiors with improvisations, music and poetry.” Ieva Astahovska



Māris Ārgalis (1954-2008). Spontaneous intervention in Māris Ārgalis' solo exhibition *Models* at the House of Knowledge (Planetarium) in Riga. 1978.



Artūrs Arnolds Riņķis (b. 1942, lives in Riga). Architectural proposals *Environment for audio-visual events*. From the exhibition *Form. Colour. Dynamics*. Circa 1978.



First Approximate Art Exhibition at the House of Knowledge (Planetarium) in Riga. Photo: Andrejs Grants. 1987



Miervaldis Polis (b. 1948). *Alter Ego in the Egovizors Salon during the Cinema Days at St.Peter's Church*. Photo: Atis Ieviņš. 1986.

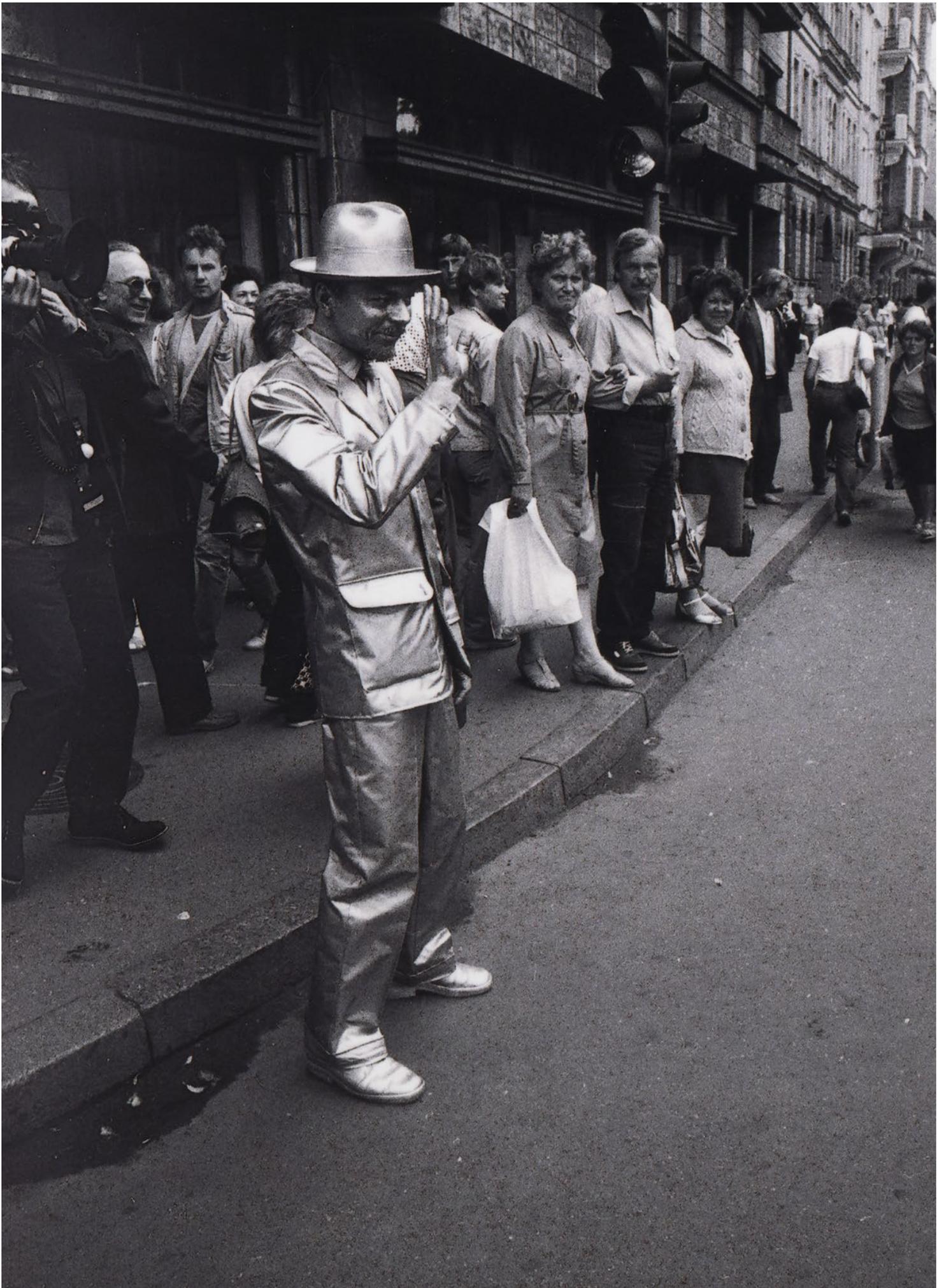


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 3, 4, 5 – Miervaldis Polis (b. 1948).
Bronze Man in Riga. 1987. Photo: Atis Ieviņš.



Gints Gabrāns. Documentation of SAN project with digitally teleported audiences. SAN is a GPS based augmented reality mobile app that connects virtual objects and structures with the real space. 2017-2018.

RIGA DATING AGENCY

The project was created in collaboration with Latvians who were willing to get acquainted with foreigners. Made up of photographs that were accompanied by the descriptions of participants as written by themselves about their interests, and contact information. The project was exhibited in art galleries and museums in Berlin, Copenhagen, Zagreb, Innsbruck, Barcelona, Stockholm, Athens, Budapest, Tallinn, and Riga, 1999–2001.



Inese Monika Pormale (b. 1974, lives in Riga) has been participating in a wide range of European theatre and opera productions for more than a decade and uses stage design to combine different forms of visual expression.

Since Gints Gabrāns (b. 1970, lives in Riga) no longer participates in exhibitions and doesn't belong to the so-called contemporary art scene, he uses exhibitions and their openings as decorations or set designs for his projects, which are produced and can be seen through the augmented reality mobile application SAN (san.lv).









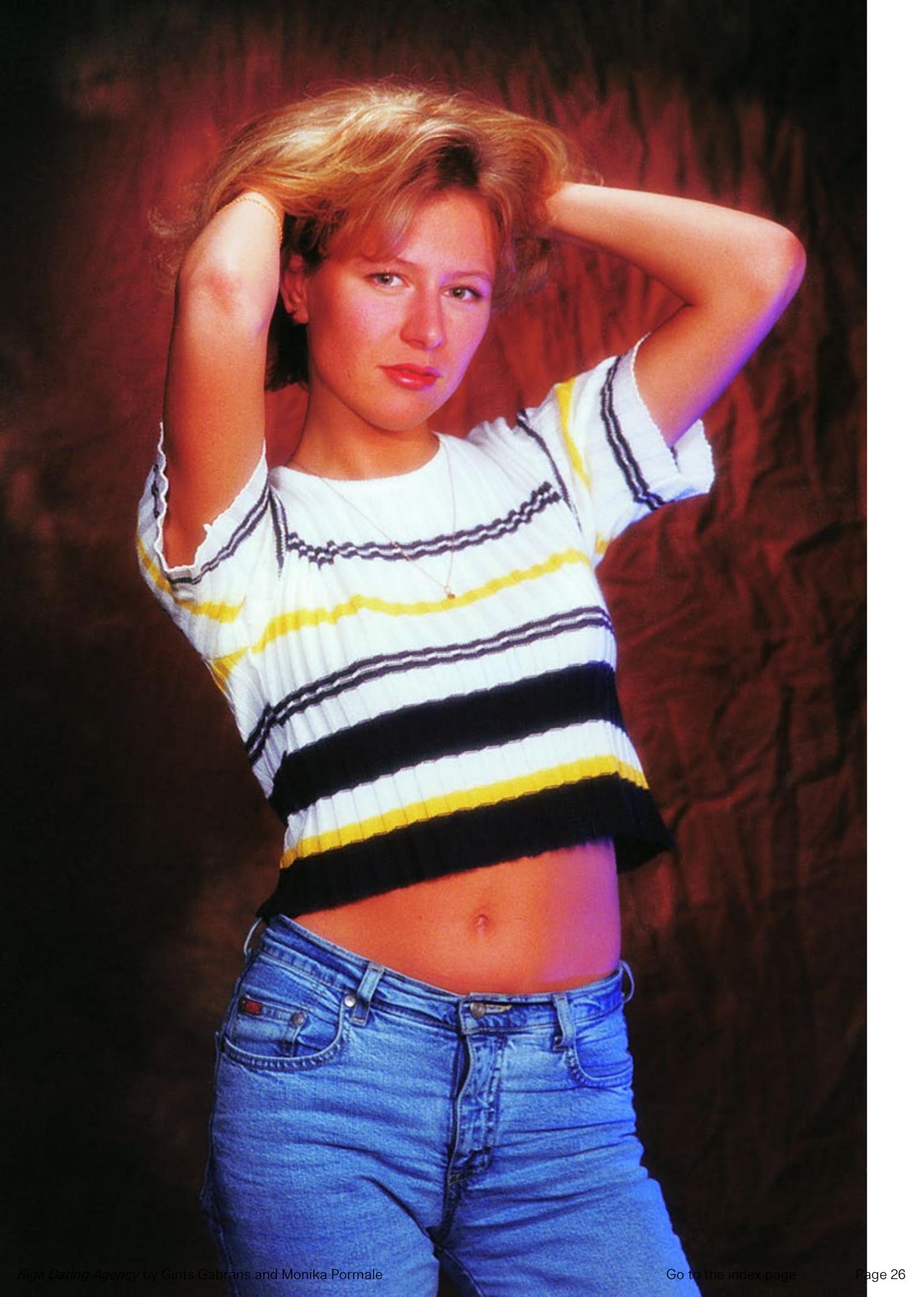
















A/B TESTING

Viktor Timofeev, coloured pencil on paper, 2018

Viktor Timofeev (b. 1984) is an artist working in drawing, painting, installations, game engines, etc. He is a recent graduate of the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam. His work has most recently been exhibited at Kim? Contemporary Art Center in Riga, Drawing Room in London, Jupiter Woods in Vienna, among others.













STILLS FROM *TRAFFIC* VIDEO BY KATRĪNA NEIBURGA

Katrīna Neiburga. Stills from *Traffic*, a documentary video filmed with video surveillance cameras mounted in a taxi, 2003.

“My son was born not long ago, and I had not been out of the house for 3 months. Mrs. Milda, a neighbour I knew since my childhood, was a taxi driver. As I recalled her stories, I decided that doing a taxi drivers job would be an appealing way to have a break from being a mother as well as a chance to talk to a great variety of people every day. Obviously, I wasn't going to join some big taxi company, so I rented out an old Volga and installed two video surveillance cameras so that depending on the need they could focus on the front seat or the back seat. Filming in this manner I worked as a taxi driver for nearly three weeks. During my period as a passenger, I filmed women taxi drivers as they talked about their work experiences. The work was exhibited at the taxi stand next to the market, which is also my childhood area – on a small screen in Mrs. Milda's taxi, where she also got to meet the audience.”

Katrīna Neiburga (b. 1978, lives in Riga) is an artist who, between other things, was a founder of the Tea Mushroom Growers' Association, a taxi driver, documentary film maker, singer, stage designer, shoe store assistant.



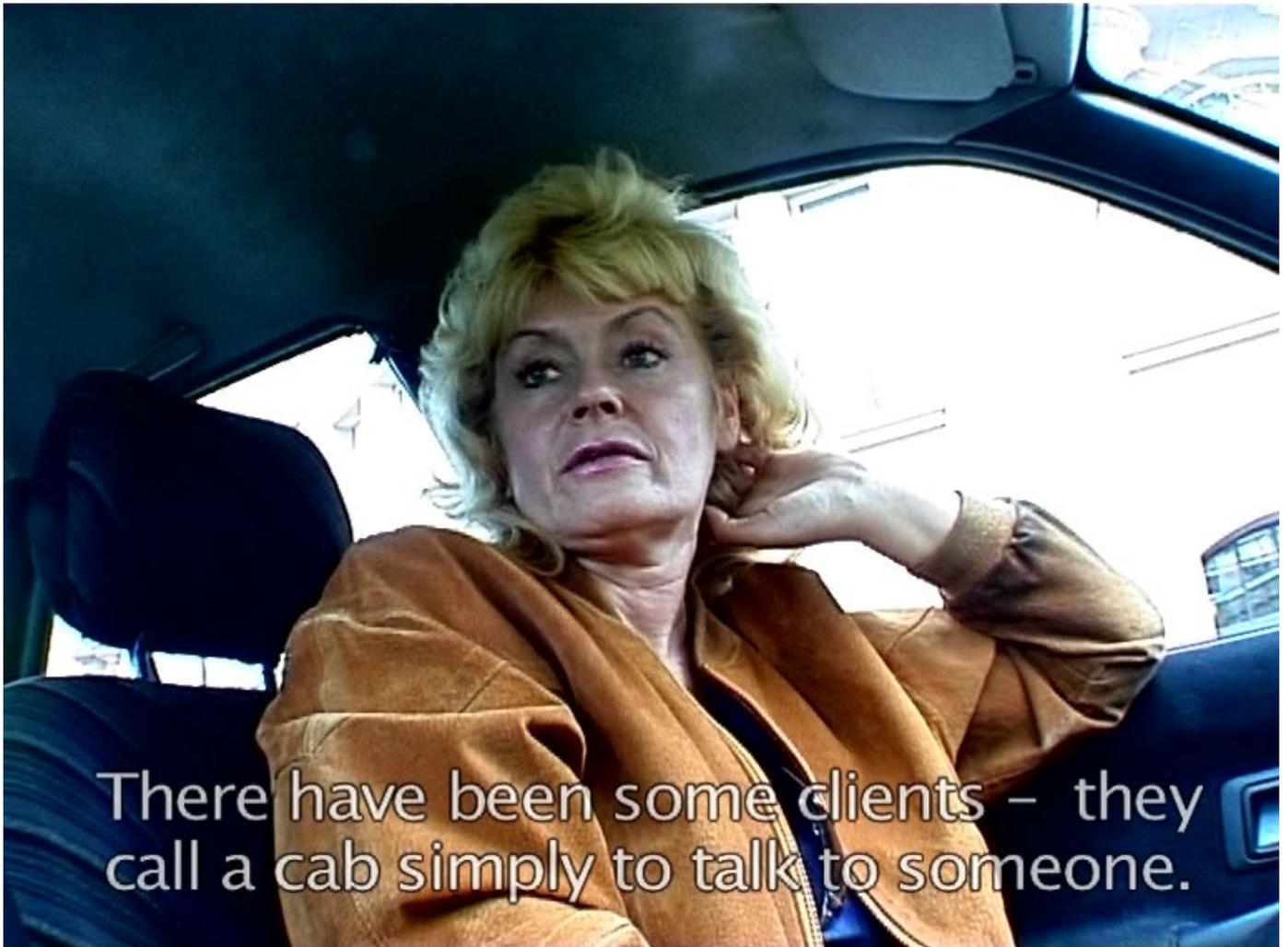








Yes, every second client does it, yes.













And not only in our company,
but also in the competing companies.

RIGA'S AUDIENCE POLL

In 2018 The Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA) and Kim? co-initiated research about Riga's audiences. The ensuing survey was executed by the Marketing and public opinion research centre SKDS, with a total of 801 Riga denizens participating. We would like to share a portion of it with you.

Q: To what extent are you interested in contemporary art? Are you...

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very interested	41	5.1	5.1	5.1
Rather interested	248	31.0	31.0	36.1
Rather not interested	245	30.6	30.6	66.7
Not interested at all	215	26.9	26.9	93.6
Hard to say/NA	51	6.4	6.4	100.0
Total	801	100.0	100.0	

Q: Would you like to know more about contemporary art?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Certainly would	85	10.6	10.6	10.6
Rather would	272	33.9	33.9	44.5
No, would not	386	48.1	48.1	92.7
Hard to say/NA	59	7.3	7.3	100.0
Total	801	100.0	100.0	

Q: When you hear the term "contemporary art", what comes to mind first?

- A nightmare
- A scribble, not real art
- A shocking work of art
- ABLV bank
- Alcohol, coffee & cigarettes
- Ancient art – created BC and has an important role nowadays
- Art as such, the century doesn't matter
- Art for art's sake, no trace of beauty
- Art forums and biennials
- Avant-garde
- Black Square
- Bohemian
- Chaos
- Complete madness
- Computer processed art
- "Contemporary art" house in the Čiekurkalns neighborhood
- Cosmic themes
- Crazy artists

Dance
Degradation
Dilettante
Distasteful and terrible, without any sense, incomprehensible and not inspirational
Entanglement of cords, paint and other materials
Exhibitions you don't like
Festivals
France
Good music
I don't think about it, I have no time for that
I haven't heard of this art
Ice age
Interesting lifestyle
It has to be explained
Kim?
Latvians have a good eye for embellishment
Milo Moire – artist from Switzerland
Miscellaneous
Modernism
Monkey-astronaut on Kalpaka Boulevard
Museum
My profession
My relative is drawing devils
Naked bodies
Nature, everything nature related
Nonsense
Paintings and music created in the current century; not
Michelangelo
Performances
Russian classical ballet
Schizophrenics and anti-artists
Snails
Something strange
Tattoos
Technology
The colorful snails that called for support for contemporary art
Things I don't understand
Ugly installations
Unpleasant to the eye
Walks
You have to think in order to understand
Youth

A selection of answers by Dita Birkenšteina

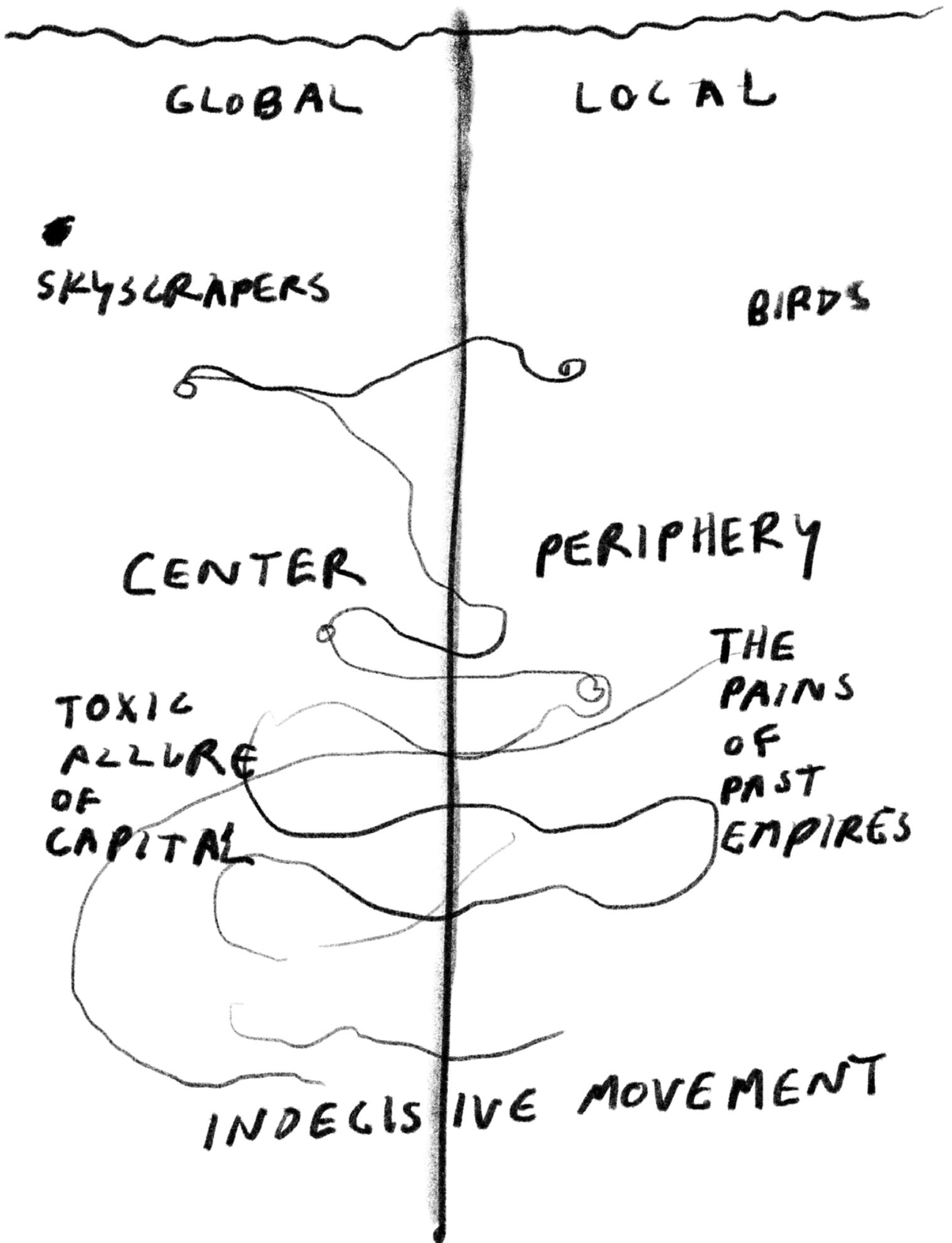
Jaakko Pallasvuo (b. 19XX, lives in Helsinki) is an artist. Pallasvuo makes videos, installations, comics, etc. exploring the anxieties of being alive now, and the prospect of a number of possible futures. In recent years his work has been presented at New York Film Festival, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, TBA21 and Jupiter Woods, among others.

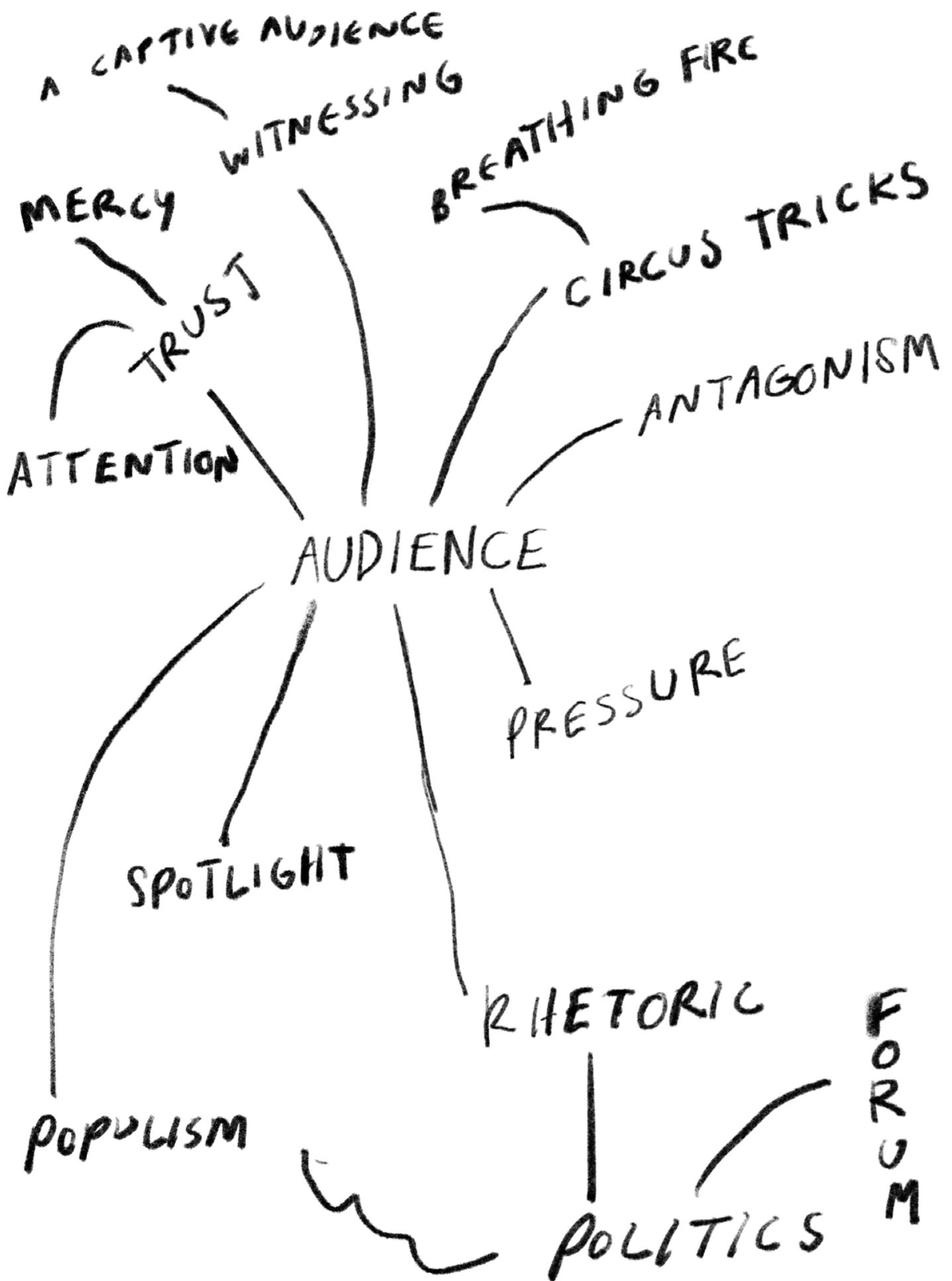
THE PROFESSIONAL AUDIENCE

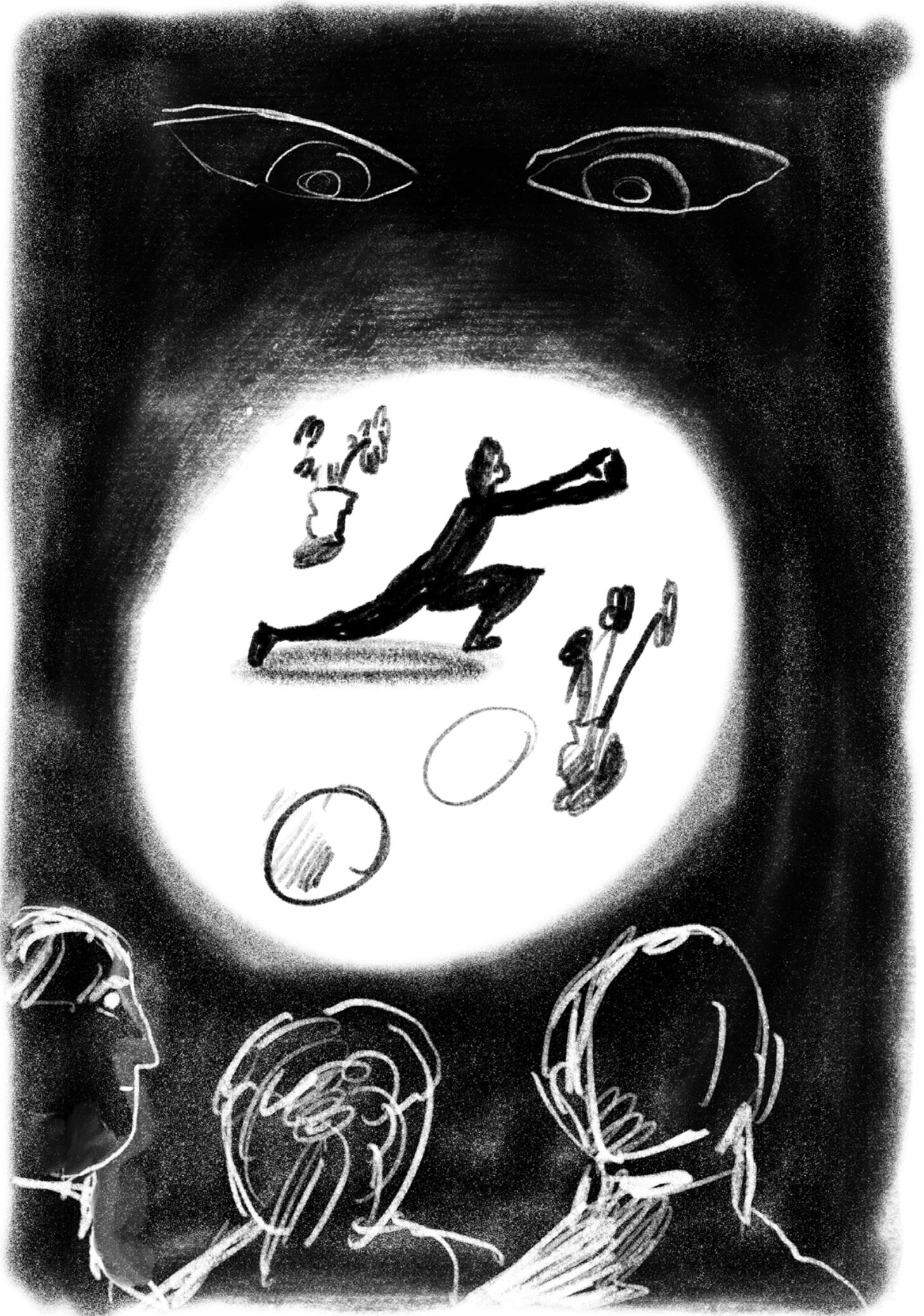




TIRED DICHO TOMIES













i just wanna communicate clearly again
i think that's why i've been kinda unmotivate
d
becuz i don't feel like i'm reaching ppl
but if i do things in a more blunt artless way it'll work like the
how to videos worked
the first lecture is about how i want this guy to play dog in my
video
but i'm scared to ask him
and it will be about my problems with the left
and then the second one will be about like
10 reasons to stop playing the art game

He has a handlebar moustache and a wry smile and short beard
stubble. A formerly plump body approaching lean. He still
looks young. He'll look young for another three years. He will
begin to look middle aged.

He has beetroot on his hands. He is smoking a roll-up cigarette. It looks like a joint.

There's a disproportionate amount of scum in the audience. Former art students graduated into alcoholics. Some furious, most already defeated.

They're making vegetarian food with shortcuts, serving it in this artspace, referencing 'relational aesthetics' like it ain't no thing. Like it ain't LOL and a fucking failure. It's like trying to be Christ without performing any actual miracles.

People holding Canon DSLRs. Well-documented feeble gestures. Yves Klein body shapes smushed onto the walls. Art Therapy. 2001-esque anti-globalization rants on tape. Mushroom soup. Oft-repeated thoughts: half embarrassing, half enticing.

One of the drunk audience members is farting into his friend's face. He has pulled down his shorts and exposed his rear. He places his ass closer to his friend. The friend is sitting on the asphalt in front of the gallery. Everything happens so fast. This is the second most poetic image of the evening.

The most poetic image is of the first guy's beetroot chunk stained hands holding a hand-rolled cigarette. It's an image in the world, something that vibrates two-dimensionality and is iconic. I try to take a picture of the image but I fail because I

don't know how to use this camera. Karl records video and I ask him to send me the video. It must suffice.

I'm so impressed by this unauthored image, this accidental image that justifies all the boring shit and the sense of embarrassment I feel in participating in art activities and the embarrassment I feel just walking down the street or reading a book in a stupid pose or sunbathing when I don't look like the kind of person who should be doing that.

I keep thinking about this work where he would be a dog. Put his improv skills to use. His slight humiliation would be the polar opposite to community building. It's what my mind needs to inhabit these relational relations. Theater is an abuse of power.

Act like a dog, I tell him. I'm not on camera. My voice is slightly distorted. He gets on his knees. What kind of dog are you? I ask him.

He is being filmed in a white space that seems to go on forever. Like the download program in *The Matrix*. He is on his knees. He is barking. His tongue is out.

His hands are dark purple from intense beetroot-handling. He is smoking a cigarette with those hands. Do you think of people as material? I ask him. What a complex material they are.

Q:

Would you agree that in the 90's contemporary art in the so called former Eastern Europe was meant, among other things, to be used as a tool to modernise and liberalise our post Soviet societies, to help make them more open, liberal, etc.? It had a certain attractiveness; however, at the same time it was sometimes labelled by audiences as alien, strange, shocking, going against local traditions, irresponsibly cosmopolitan and postmodern, etc. Do you think there have been any changes in audience's expectations towards contemporary art in recent decades after our countries integrated into the North Atlantic alliances?

Inga Lāce:

It is interesting to take a step back and link this question to the fact that contemporary art already existed in Eastern Europe before the 90's, it was just called something else, it didn't have the infrastructure of contemporary art, nor the discourse. It took place underground, in public spaces or in apartments, partially invisible, sometimes in-between the lines or in-between other disciplines like design, music or architecture, sometimes without an audience at all except a group of close friends, at times illegal, but I believe, sometimes it played with the idea of audience (like *Happsoc* in Bratislava, for example). What the 90's really changed was contemporary art's institutionalization. We reflected on this process in the exhibition "Lost in the Archive" that I curated with Andra Silapētere in 2016. The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art is a successor of one of several George Soros centres for contemporary art and inherited its archive, by commissioning artists to work with this archive, we questioned the impact of these past centres. One of the thoughts we found fascinating was that together with help and training in freedom of speech and democracy – those being the main aims of the Soros Foundation – with these centres for contemporary art all of the Eastern European countries also got a function to carefully archive the current art. It simply came in the same package. Thus, it was part of a larger geopolitical process whereupon there were suddenly *free* countries *floating* in transition, without a clear direction or means of reaching it. Someone had to *pick them up* and help take the right course. We also found out that George Soros didn't particularly like contemporary art, which could serve as another proof for a scenario of modernisation and liberalisation.

I think nowadays the audience for contemporary art has grown significantly in numbers and has to be counted and accounted for (in reports). Since we began counting, I can say that contemporary art has certainly grown in attraction among wider circles of people. Also, because it has been entering more and more spaces that are not primarily dedicated to art at all, like the Museum of Medicine, the still operating railway station in Jurmala – Dubulti, and empty buildings, even the Latvian National Art Museum, since its reopening, has more space for contemporary art. So, I hope that nowadays the expectations of the

audience could at least occasionally, or rather more often, cross paths with the works of artists and curators, letting them meet before they go in different directions again, challenge each other, annoy if needed, to only learn from each other and come back to meet again.

Beti Žerovc: On Audiences and Institutional Art

Dear Valentinas,

Thank you for inviting me to do an interview and for the first question: “Would you agree that in the 90’s contemporary art in the so called former Eastern Europe was meant, among other things, to be used as a tool to modernise and liberalise our post Soviet societies, to help make them more open, liberal, etc.? It had a certain attractiveness; however, at the same time it was sometimes labelled by audiences as alien, strange, shocking, going against local traditions, irresponsibly cosmopolitan and postmodern, etc. Do you think there have been any changes in audience’s expectations towards contemporary art in recent decades after our countries integrated into the North Atlantic alliances?” And please excuse me that my response to this and to your short concept for the issue on audiences somehow turned into an essay, a letter.

To begin with, I wouldn’t put the Baltic countries and my home Slovenia, in the 80’s on a common denominator, since you lived in your particular “soviet reality”, while we lived something else. We lived well, in a very equal, and in regard to social services, very spoiled society, we were free to travel and also – in my opinion – our art and culture were blooming and were stranger, more shocking and going against local traditions than than in the 90’s. To say all this is not my personal vanity, but my political persuasion, that in times when we are told there are no alternatives to capitalism, I stick to the important differences among political systems and emphasise – still being perfectly aware of its problematic sides – the many qualities of the Yugoslav late variant of socialism.

I could agree that we might have more in common nowadays, since we all became (too) small (in)dependant states at the same time and in those processes, we were all – our contemporary art scenes included – mixing things up quite wrongly and taking democracy and capitalism almost as synonyms.

For all of us two very problematic regimes and mind sets won at the same time, nationalism and capitalism, and now, besides other problems in contemporary art, we also have to deal with this particular reality, which often tears us between different, even antagonistic standpoints and ethics. Embedded in national(istic) structures, schemes and thinking, which usually imply also democratic ideas about art being something that belongs to everyone, we have a hard time fully collaborating in a global, more and more privatised and market oriented contemporary art world. Not only because we would not want to, but because we’re unimportant, small players and even “our” capitalists

simply neither are rich enough nor interested in their local (=national) art. On the other hand, also our politicians and bureaucrats don't really need us as allies – as they did in the processes of establishing national states – and they even see us as a burden.

Therefore we usually have to collaborate in a messy conglomerate of “creative industries”, basically being a diligent, nodding helper to tourism, building trade (gentrification) and some other economic sectors and, secondly, being a place to go when there's really nothing else to do or when we have no other place to leave our kids. Somehow, as long as we prove to be a valid particle of this mechanism, our existence seems “safe” and also, we're left, more or less, to do as we please in our institutions. This is also the case because our toothless, dependant position is now obvious to everyone, though on the other hand, it brings us annoying feelings of senselessness and powerlessness. Paradoxically we have quantitatively more art institutions and we produce more art than ever, but the meaning of it is fading.

It's weird how in the last years in the Baltic or ex-Yugoslav countries also national or civic museums of contemporary art, that were built to present our very particular and special cultural processes of the past decades, ended up looking completely alike. The same slick white spaces lit from above. Same abstract canvases, same black and white shabby photos, the same similarly weird looking objects in the middle of the rooms. Maybe those things really mattered in their time, but set in those uniform settings their ideas and previous value for their communities are no longer palpable or even readable at all. They became mere dumb particles of strictly the same iconographical program presented all around the world, proving, in the first place, the belonging of those institutions to the same religion.

Often such institutions are empty, to the disappointment of their directors and staff. But given that today the financial value of an artwork has eclipsed any other value it might have, and that our institutions are therefore only mere copies of their more “valuable” sisters, they cannot shine and attract as the latter do. If we disregard professionals, collectors or people otherwise involved in art, it's mostly schoolchildren that are brought there and tourists are walking around on rainy days. With absent minded faces they seem to sense the whole displays – more than particular artworks – as being weak echoes of something already known... Everybody seems happy when the interaction with the art ends and the more pleasant part of the visit starts: the shop, the cafeteria.

I find those rituals completely at odds with the institutions' usual claims of how their art is empowering and can even teach people to think critically. I would even claim the opposite: we're rather teaching people to bow silently and submissively before things they do not understand. In relation to audiences this is, for me, now the crucial problem that needs to be addressed.

So, in regard to your question, if I think there have been changes in audience's expectations towards contemporary art in recent

decades, I first query what audiences do you have in mind at all? The children and the tourists? Or maybe the whole body of tax payers, who should visit, if they're already paying for our institutions? Or some other, hopefully less abstract group? Secondly, talking about audiences in the sense that those outside of the art world have something meaningful to say to us that we're willing to listen to, seems to me at least naïve. For contemporary art institutions outside opinions didn't and don't really matter and it seems they will matter even less. What matters are those "inside", among them especially their owners, whether public or private. Therefore, in the light of the recent growth of the private institutions, a more relevant question would be, what do those private owners have to say to their audiences and why do they suddenly speak so loudly?

And rather than addressing abstract, imaginary audiences I suggest that we, the professionals, start to deal with what we are doing and for whom.

Firstly, we have to admit that the classical European concept of an art exhibition or institution as an educative, humanising and empowering mechanism is not working anymore – if it ever was – and we helped this along tremendously by being snobbish, two-faced or simply stupid and by making dangerous liaisons with whoever was willing to pay for our projects.

Secondly, we have to stop pretending that we don't see a total gap between the art production, that is made to separate and to distinguish rather than for massive sharing, and the people whom we're trying to open our institutions to. We accommodate them through shops, shiny souvenirs, cafeterias and simplified guided tours, where they are told to appreciate and even to comment on things they don't understand and that also cannot be understood or appreciated at all without possessing very specific, previous knowledge. Actually, such a treatment tells us that those artworks have no particular inner value worth understanding or discovering and, I assume, this makes their aura consist more and more of merely their financial value. Those rituals seem somehow empty, even meaningless and harmless, but are – exactly because of that – very, very powerful.

This is not empowerment but disrespect and disempowerment. It cements the horrible logic, where not just artworks but everything in this world is only worth what it is worth financially and finally leads to a more unjust world. And this dangerous avalanche will have a quick and strong effect especially on places such as ours. Being financially weak in such a system not only turns our art into complete crap, but the logic, where all the importance goes only to where the money is, is deadly for our whole societies.

We should stop pretending that already the mere production of art is a virtue in itself and that art exhibition is such a medium that will by itself turn things right, because it won't. An exhibition is like a gun that can be turned one way or the other. We will soon have to offer a completely different *modus nascendi et vivendi* of art or acknowledge that we're no different than Church art.

But until then, what we can do as individuals (and immediately) is to start carefully watching our steps. Let's not tell sweet stories about art that we even ourselves don't understand, just because it's our turn to make a guided tour. If we don't have a really, truly good reason, let's not waste our time, energy and money on catalogues, being lavish or shabby. Let's not do the openings, if they are merely social gatherings for the art scene. If we desperately need an event, there are tons of possibilities to do something substantial that makes sense. A lot can be done, let's just not wait for the sign. There will be no sign.

I'm sending my very best regards and lots of love from Ljubljana to Riga.

Yours as ever, Beti

Q:

This magazine, among other things, is interested in how audiences contribute to shaping scenes. But first I'd like to start by reminding of the seminal piece "Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space" (P.82) by Brian O'Doherty who concludes that, "we seem to have ended up with the wrong audience." According to him, the fault of an artwork's inaccessibility lies within the viewer. However, today, in the age of the "emancipated spectator" (Jacques Rancière), this concept of "the wrong audience" might be interpreted in different ways. To quote Suhail Malik, "contemporary art is now fully integrated into a global social-entertainment network; artists are part of the celebrity circuit; art spaces and creatives are key elements in gentrification strategies; museums of contemporary art are significant attractors for international tourism [...]", in other words, it is difficult to ignore the problematic contribution of the audiences to the final results of what we find in galleries and museums. Would you agree with that? If not, how do you imagine the audiences of the Riga Biennial?

Katerina Gregos:

Firstly, Brian O'Doherty (1) to whom the question refers seems to be talking about something else, when he expresses the opinion "that most of the people who look at art now are not looking at art; they are looking at the idea of art they carry in their minds". How did he find that out? What was his research design and how precise is "most of the people" defined? Aside from that, what else *can* people do than look at art with at least an "idea of art they carry in their minds"? How would you know that you are looking at art and not at something else, without an idea of what art is? And where would you carry ideas if not in your mind? But beyond Doherty's generalisations and linguistic slips, it would indeed be naive to ignore the contribution of audiences to what we find in public and private art galleries. The use of the plural already indicates that we are dealing not with one but with multiple *audiences*, which differ in expectations and outlook. The contribution of different audiences likely leads to different results of what we see

in galleries and museums. If museums and galleries don't take into account *what* kind of audience they want to address, they run the risk of attracting the “wrong” audience (i.e. the audience that does not *look*, just consumes), or no audience at all. When a museum or gallery plans an exhibition it should always ask: what is our target group? How do we reach them? The answers to these questions will largely determine the nature and scope of the exhibition. This is in fact the most direct influence of audiences on what we see in exhibitions. Museums and galleries have to take the different expectations of audiences into account, otherwise they will end up navel-gazing. That said, it is much easier to attract audiences to crowd-pleasing, populist shows – one could think of the “problematic contribution” you mention, in this sense – because you have to do less work with mediation, education, both of which take a great deal of time and effort. Beyond that, Doherty's idea that “the artwork's inaccessibility lies within the viewer” needs to be elaborated otherwise it might seem to smack of arrogance. Indeed, if “inaccessibility” lies within the viewer, one should ask why is that? And the reason, quite simply, is not the audience's fault, as Doherty seems to suggest; but the lack of the right conditions or education in order to be able to overcome this inaccessibility. All forms of culture need some mediation and educational basis, and art is no exception. This means institutions should provide opportunities for audiences to access this kind of knowledge. And speaking of inaccessibility, let's not forget the responsibility of the ‘art world’ where one often encounters sub-standard, sloppy or lazy art, accompanied by fuzzy, intellectually pretentious, un-understandable and shallow texts that don't correspond to what one sees and certainly don't aid “accessibility”. So we, as art professionals, also have a responsibility here. It's also important to remember that the relation between artist, artwork and art audience changes with time. For whom was the caveman working? And the Mediaeval painter? The Renaissance artist? The Romantic? The Impressionist? The modern artist? Were the changes in art history a consequence of the behaviour and interest of the artist, the audience, the commissioner, the change of society at large, social, religious, economic, political influences? What audience was the art secretly made in concentration camps for? Sometimes the artist is the first to influence society and the way we appreciate art, but sometimes the artist responds to changes in society. It is also important to point out that, O'Doherty's essay relates to something that happened in the seventies, forty years ago, the time he wrote it. It would be interesting to know if he still abides by his original opinion. Society, art and the art-world have no doubt changed since then. Finally, how I imagine the audiences for the Riga Biennial depends very much on what we will do to reach out to people from different backgrounds. In general, I imagine the audiences for the Riga Biennial growing slowly but steadily if we do our job right. I see one of the missions of the biennial as being to seek out what O' Doherty calls the “missing audience”, which to me also means the untapped, potential audience that is out there.

1.

In Doherty's essay, which was first published in 1976, he argues that the "antiseptic white walls of galleries" have helped to determine the meaning of modern art as much as the artworks themselves. He strives to move the spectator beyond the white cube, emphasising its role in the experience and interpretation of art. In my opinion one could also argue, even more strongly, that the (minimal-conceptual) artworks of the seventies were more responsible for determining the white walls of the galleries.

Inga Lāce (b. 1986, lives in Riga) is a curator at the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA). She is currently working on a research project *Portable Landscapes* tracing and contextualizing Latvian artists' emigration and exile stories throughout 20th century (at Villa Vassilieff, Paris, and Latvian National Art Museum, Riga, 2018).

Beti Žerovc is a Slovene art historian and art theorist. She is the author of the book *When Attitudes Become the Norm; The Contemporary Curator and Institutional Art* (Archive Books, Berlin and Igor Zabel Association, Ljubljana 2015, first reprint 2018).

Katerina Gregos, chief curator, RIBOCA1

Hey,

Back in 2002 I was a 9-year-old-visiting an educational excursion at the Latvian National Museum of Art. At that age my interest in art consisted of wanting to draw a somewhat realistic portrait of Britney Spears. I had no expectations for this visit, to say the least.

Nevertheless, being the model student that I was, I entered the grand building cautiously, feeling intimidated by the vastness of the premises. The watchful museum staff watched us in a suspicious manner. The feeling of uneasiness didn't leave me as I wandered through the exhibition halls, walking softly to minimise the squeaking of the waxed parquet floors. Observing the enormous paintings, I faked my interest in them to impress the adults around me. However, the attention span of a child is short, my interest was dwindling, and I was inevitably getting bored. Deciding I had spent a respectable amount of time downstairs, I headed towards the unexplored second floor.

A white, rectangular podium the size of a single bed was placed in the middle of an otherwise empty room. The main lights were dimmed, and a blue tinted beam shone straight down from the ceiling casting a video projection onto the flat surface. It portrayed a barely dressed woman. She was lying peacefully, breathing steadily under these translucent sheets. At moments she shifted in her sleep, pulling the projected fabric with her. These brief shifts startled yet fascinated me.

The contact between the two-dimensional human figure and the solid surface reminded me of an examination table from an age-restricted episode of "The X-Files" that I might have secretly peeped at through a gap in the living room door. This last deduction only increased my uneasiness. None of the teachers or museum staff was present, yet I had a vague notion of not being allowed to watch this woman sleep, as if the view was out of the unattainable adult world, too uncomfortably intimate for me to witness.

I ended up walking downstairs and returning to the second floor several times during the visit, still attempting to pay attention to the paintings, not wanting to reveal the fact that I was mesmerized by this light emitting woman. As I was lying in bed that night back at home, I still thought about her sleeping in the museum on the comfortless white podium.

Sincerely,
Santa



[...]

Dear Santa, thanks!

Only what was the artwork? Do you think you can find its credits?

[...]

Hey,

I've kind of hit a dead-end with my investigation. The museum lady found one exhibition that might have matched my description and was open around that time, but I don't remember any of the artworks and none of them seem to be the one I described & illustrated in my project.

Supposedly there was a duo show by two Danish artists Charlotte Petersen and Christian Clausen titled "RITUS FIT". From what I've found online, they displayed sculptures made from old fitness machines that the exhibition viewers could try out and interact with. I believe as a child I would have remembered seeing this exhibition, because of its playful and interactive nature, however, I have no memory of it.

So I think I'm either crazy or some of the facts have been mixed up. I'm pretty sure about the date, because I found it on a photograph from that excursion, but now I'm questioning the location (whether it was in the main LNMM building, the exhibition hall "Arsenāls" or even at the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design).

I guess the question is, should I keep digging deeper or is it too late to make any additions to the publication? There's the option to consult other archives from the locations I mentioned, but I've noticed that the bureaucracy of these institutions tends to move things forward quite slowly.

Also, while I was digging through the internet, I stumbled across this work (2, 3) by Latvian artist Juris Boiko from NSRD (*Workshop for the Restoration of Unfelt Feelings*) and on an intuitive level it really reminded me of the installation that I recreated & described in my project. Almost to a point that it made me believe he must be the author of the artwork I was looking for, however I couldn't find any evidence of it. Thought I should show it to you anyway, because it seemed like a neat idea.

Sincerely,
Santa

Santa France (b. 1993, lives and works in Riga) is a Latvian multimedia artist mainly focusing on exploring the potential of 3D software and its usage in creating web-collages, videos, animated .GIF images and digital illustrations that deal with the themes of self-reflection, solitude, nostalgia and internet culture.

[Marta Trekere](#) is your Guardian Angel based in Riga







Stills from Kurzeme Television news, 2010

why would you even care about art

why would you even take this kind of challenge, this daunting task, to understand one's mind like it's yours

why would anyone care for art? why does it have to be such a torture rather than just pleasure

don't worry, i talk about myself and you. one holy spirit to another – using my own discrimination, knowledge and judgment

what is worth observing? to learn to see new art is easy. you just have to close your eyes, imagine the artwork you hate the most and keep in touch with it. which, i know, seems like an impossibility at first. now open your eyes. your sight, very tired at the start becomes curious, then interested and progresses to something pleasurable, subconsciously. that's how you get to see advanced art

i close my eyes observing method no. 1: me as a picture hanger

i've smelled wet glue for 5 days in a row, i'm getting dizzy. i look to the artist, he's my best friend for a week. he just says hi to me and tells what to do and i do it. i have dragged pictures across the exhibition hall all night. mentally i'm not ready to talk about art anymore. no place was good enough for the right observation. we moved the picture every hour and it was wrong every time. i would drag the heavy canvas for a few more hours. when my artist and i stopped he said: look! it's all right. it was a picture of a dead badger and many people observing him. i couldn't take it. it's too general. tell me, my friend, doesn't it look fine? i didn't answer anything, i wouldn't dare. i became anxious and ran away. i had some paint on my fingers. i'm worth 6000 euros. "when she comes back, say it looks great."

explanation: no explanation needed.

method no. 2: me as a drunk

looooool what is this crap? looooool

explanation:

i would like to "educate" you. the only trouble with the public is education. we are not ready to see it. the public simply does not care about it. education is putting phantasm in one's eyes, which, in general, is not understandable to anyone, except the artist. the Divine Joke. never say that something is insincere. just please say that you don't understand it.

we just want to have wine or beer and have a good time. i just want to talk gibberish and be irresponsible in front of the artwork, but only the

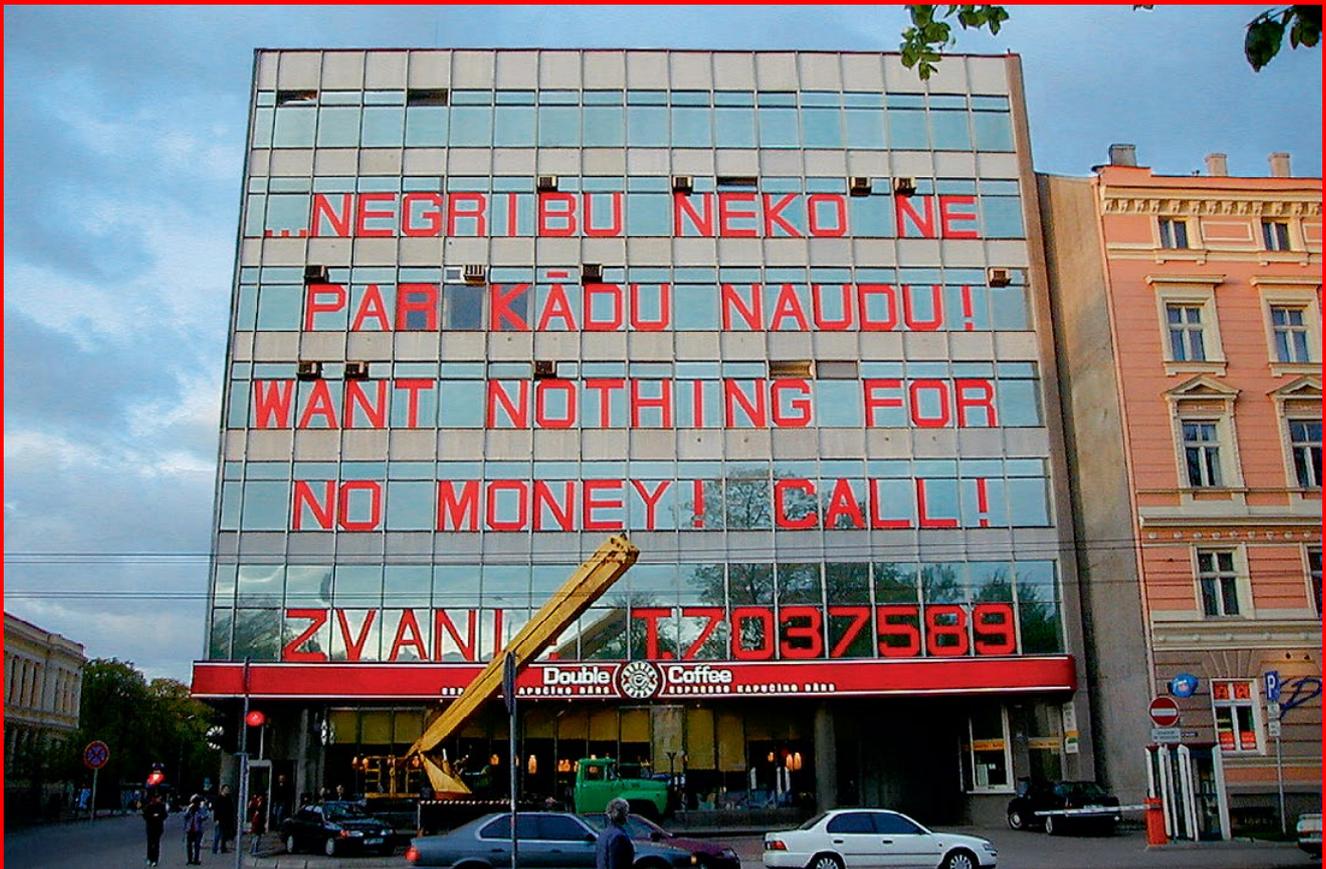
critic can look at the badger. meanwhile i'll just take a look at what my enemy is wearing tonight. should i buy the same sunglasses? just keep quiet while i'm talking, please.

method no. 3: me as an artist

i'm making something that perhaps won't bring me anything for the next couple of years. what am i doing here? why is nobody recognizing me. i'm ashamed of myself, of things that i want to show. i'm trying to distance myself from the public eye. hiding behind a cocktail glass. i'm happy when i like something and if someone else likes the same thing. then we can talk, and we can scream at each other. we can enjoy the same drinks and maybe later we could sleep together.

explanation: no explanation needed.

00:01:01:00 A sentence disappears, shows up, moves left or right, but sounds different every time while ending with an “ending with”



Installation for the exhibition LV.TM ('Latvia. Trademark'). A building on the corner of Krišjāņa Barona Street and Raiņa Boulevard, Riga. 2003

(The work was completed over a single night by using industrial climbers. The following night the work was taken down following the demand of the building owners who claimed that the installation was a traffic hazard.)